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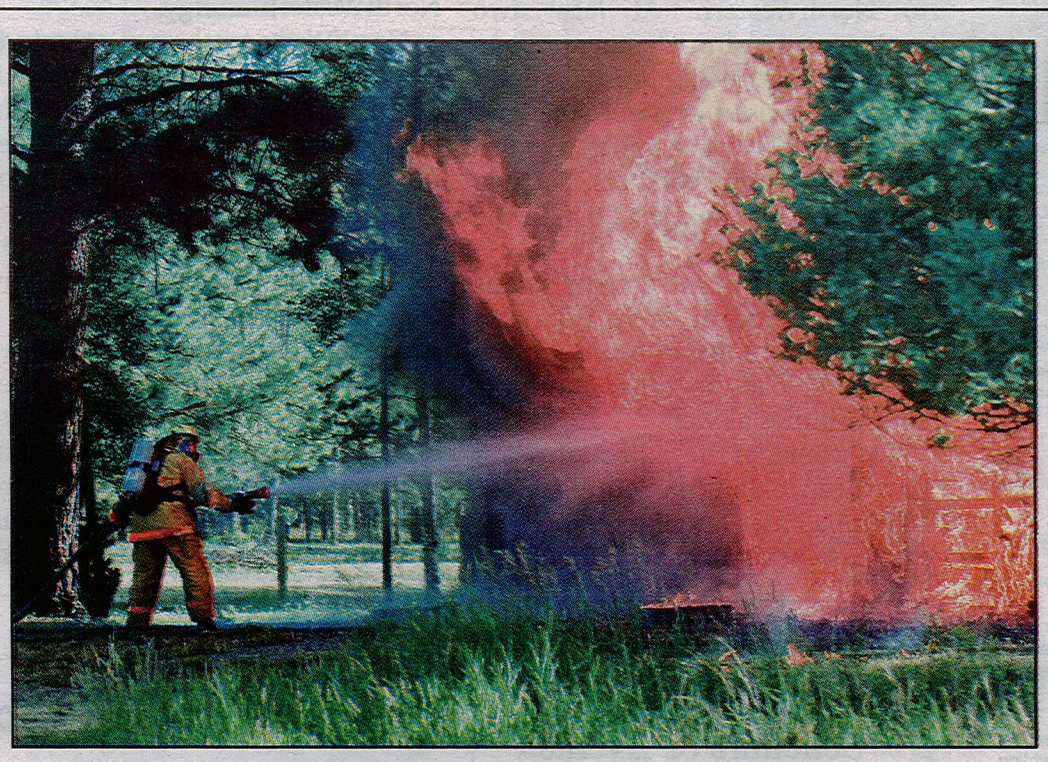
Blackfoot Valley Dispatch

▲A wall of flames rolls out of the open garage door towards Lincoln firefighter Thomas Walters.
▶Walters keeps water on flames.



Mid-morning fire destroys garage

Story/photos by Roger Dey
BVD Editor

An apparent electrical fire destroyed a garage on Good News Lane Thursday morning, July 30.

No one was injured in the fire, but the building, belonging to Josh and Sue Lattin, was a complete loss.

Lincoln Fire Chief Zach Muse said they believe rodents were likely the cause of the fire.

"Squirrels or some kind of varmint was probably in there chewing wires in the attic. That's kind of what we're gathering after the investigator was here. It was one of those freaky things," Muse said.

Josh Lattin, who works as a resource specialist for the Lincoln Ranger District said a call about the fire came in, but the address they gave wasn't his. "I thought 'Oh, that's my neighbor's.' So I ran out to help my neighbors and no, it was my place," he said.

He almost missed the call completely. He was about to head into the woods for six days. "My backpack was in the truck, keys in my hand. I was almost out of here. They wouldn't have gotten me. I would have been out of cell phone range." On top of that, his wife, Sue, and their kids were out of town, visiting family in Canada.

In addition to the structure itself, Lattin said the fire destroyed his tools, his boat, his families camping gear, bikes and

See FIRE Pg. 4

Adam Gianforte of Bozeman leaves Ovando on his 29--inch mountain unicycle, Aug. 2. (Photo courtesy Kathy Schoendoerfer)

Adventure & awareness on one wheel

Roger Dey
BVD Editor

Adam Gianforte of Bozeman picked a unique way to spend his summer after graduating from Cornell with a degree in Linguistics. Rather than head to the beach, take a road trip to Vegas or backpack across Europe, he chose to tackle the 2768- mile Great Divide Mountain Bike Trail.
On a unicycle.

"I heard about this route and thought it would be awesome to unicycle it," he said.

The trail from Banff to Antelope Wells, N.M. is the same route the annual Tour Divide mountain bike race takes, and to Gianforte's knowledge, only two other people have ridden it on a unicycle. His goal is to do it in 72 days, five days less the current 77-day record.

There's much more to

See UNICYCLE Pg. 4

An excavator works to fill a dump truck at the bottom of the Mike Horse mine waste repository Friday , July 31, while a second truck drops off a load of waste at the top of the dam and a second excavator fills a haul truck.

Mike Horse clean-up remains a challenge, but on schedule

Story/photos by Roger Dey
BVD Editor

In the bottom of the Mike Horse mine waste impoundment, now about two thirds gone, an excavator fills dump trucks with the contaminated "blue goo" that fills Bear Trap canyon. The trucks make their way to the top of the Mike Horse Dam, now a full 25 feet lower than it was at the start, to drop off the goo before heading back for another load.

It takes another, larger, excavator on top of the dam a minute and a half to fill the side-dump trucks that make the seven-mile trip to the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex repository on Section 35.

See CLEAN UP Pg. 6

1865-2015 ❖ CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF LINCOLN HISTORY

LOCAL EVENTS

August 7
Barn Dance
Grantier Barn
7 p.m.

August 8
Lincolnstock IV Music concert
Hooper Park
5-10 p.m.

August 8 - 9
Art in the Park
Hooper Park

August 14
LHS Football and Volleyball practice begins
Lincoln School

August 14
Public Meeting Matt KIng House preservation.
Lincoln School gym
5:30 p.m.

August 15
Snowmobile trail cleanup
Meet at PSW clubhouse
10 a.m.

August 22 & 23
Bob Purdy Memorial Softball Tourney
Hooper Park

August 24
First Day of School
Lincoln School

◄A bulldozer operator spreads out mine waste for de-watering and compaction in the UBMC repository as a haul truck pulls in with another load.

◄◄The large excavator, operated by John Foster, fills a haul truck with mine waste from the Mike Horse impoundment. It takes Foster just a minute and a half to full a truck, but he has to pay attention to the wheel and axle configuration of each truck to ensure he distributes the load correctly.

◄ReAnne Foster waits with the 'air lance' as a truck pulls up on it's way out of the UBMC repository. Foster uses the air lance, essentially a high pressure air hose, to knock off any residual mine waste that may remain on the trucks after they make a delivery.

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That process, repeated dozens of times a day, has lead to the removal of approximately 200,000 cubic yards of waste from the Bear Trap and Mike Horse drainages since the job of removing it began last summer. Work resumed in May and though it was shut down for three days following the rainstorm July 28, everything appeared to be running like clockwork last week.

"I think it's going really well," said Eddie Roatch, project superintendent for Helena Sand and Gravel, the company contracted to remove the impoundment. "Last year we had kind of a slow start, but we're on schedule now."

Shellie Haaland, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality construction manager for the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex, said Streamworks is expected this week to begin the process of re-establishing a floodplain for Bear Trap Creek. "They'll be coming up, looking for all the materials and getting set up for what they're gonna be doing. As Helena Sand gets the area opened they'll start doing what they need to do."

She also said the addition of a few more trucks has increased hauling capacity. Likewise, a new exit road below the dam has eliminated a bottleneck for the trucks on a blind corner on the original one-lane haul road, making trips safer and faster for the drivers.

Despite the visible progress, Haaland said they have run into some challenges, or as she prefers to call them, "opportunities to excel."

The excavation of the impoundment has included a few "opportunities." Haaland explained that the waste is removed in sections, excavating from the top about a third of the way down. Then work moves the bottom of the drainage and the rest of the section is removed. The method generally helps keep the contaminated, clay-like "blue goo," in the impoundment from sliding. However, as they've excavated more deeply they've begun finding the "goo" is giving way to fingers of sand and clay, which hold a considerable amount of water and act as a slip plane. When they open a new excavation, the water-laden material is sometimes released, resulting in part of the new face sloughing off.

"Nothing's really straightforward and you really don't know what you're gonna get until you dig down in it. We haven't encountered anything we can't get past," Roatch said. "I think it's a unique project. I've been moving dirt a longtime and I've never done anything like this before."

The restoration of the flood plain of Bear Trap Creek provides yet another opportunity.

Haaland explained that the bedrock in the drainage sweeps down at an angle and meets a vertical face on the east side of the small valley.

In the 1975 flood that tore out a section of the dam, water ran up against the bedrock along that 200-300 foot long vertical face and ripped out material clear to the bottom of the valley. To fill the gap, crews shot an inch and a half to two inches of concrete onto the entire face and backfilled with tailings and a clean brown, high-clay-content dirt that acted as a plug.

"What we're looking at doing now is, as we excavate down and get these tailings out of here, is to potentially use part of that plug to fill this hole (which is) going to be about a 25-foot hole with about a straight vertical face."

Haaland explained that the new flood plain would be designed to ensure the creek doesn't become channelized along that face and to mitigate possible erosion long enough to allow the new flood plain and vegetation to establish itself.

Several unexpected surprises at the old Mike Horse repository, constructed in the 1990s, led to yet another opportunity, this time to restore the natural channel for Mike Horse Creek. Originally, the plan was to leave it in place, but they found the "as-built" documentation of its construction missed a few thing, such as the fact that an impermeable top liner that was supposed to be there was missing, and that the whole thing was built atop contaminated material. During the removal of the old repository, they found a pipe - originally thought to be a natural seep - that came from under the pre-treatment pond and flowed contaminated water towards Mike Horse Creek. The water was routed to the treatment facility and the pipe will have to be traced to is source and removed next year

"The Mike Horse repository 'maybe-builts' are a perfect example of how not everything you need to know is in the report," Haaland said.

There is one aspect of the project that apparently hasn't come with many surprises.

"We're very very pleased with the way it's come together," Haaland said of the progress on the UBMC repository near Highway 279. She credited the dozer operators and other personnel at the repository for ensuring the mine waste that's hauled in is properly de-watered and compacted. "In general, we have such good operators on the dozers that they just take such great care of this place, she said. "They have it so well compacted it really comes in just like a brick, which is exactly the way you want it to set up," she said.

A walk across the waste filling the repository revealed it was indeed nearly brick hard. The surface of the repository did show signs of flowing water from the recent rainstorm, but even the water that formed puddles clearly didn't permeate into the waste.

Some contaminated material is carried by runoff through the storm drains system into the catchment area below the impoundment, but Haaland said once the repository is nearing completion, the contaminated material there would be removed and put into the repository.

The next public tour of the project is scheduled for Aug. 16 and a virtual tour of the site went online July 31 at deq.mt.gov/statesuperfund/ubmc/virtour/default.mcpx. "It basically gives the same tour and allows people to see the same things," Haaland said.

Whenever possible, Haaland will accommodate anyone who would like a tour of the project but may not be able to make one of the scheduled public tours. "This project is the peoples' project and I want them to be happy with it," she said.